

# Modern Belgian Art and Our Duty Toward It

A Glance at the School of Painting and Sculpture Which Will Need American Encouragement After the War.

By ROYAL CORTISSOZ.

Those who sympathize with stricken Belgium must take a long look ahead. Help rendered now is hardly more important than that which will be needed when the Germans have been expelled from the land which they defile by their unlawful presence. And then, of course, the great question will be how to help the Belgians to help themselves. Necessarily, the first problem will be the restoration of agriculture and the industries. But the arts, too, will require prompt encouragement, and while the nature of the situation created by the vandalism of the invader will assure the architects of immediate employment, the outlook for the painter and sculptor is not so auspicious. Here especially the people of the United States can be of service. They can show hospitality to exhibitions of modern Belgian art, thereby giving to the makers of it not only practical support, but the moral stimulus which has, perhaps, an even greater value.

Consider the plight of the Belgian artist. Overwhelmed by sorrow, he has much more than a livelihood to regain. He must re-make his whole world, he must revive his elasticity of spirit, he must recapture if he can the happy serenity which is essential to the creation of works of beauty. The poets may learn in suffering what they teach in song. Their brethren in the other arts may also draw inspiration from tragic experience, but the swift impulse which sometimes expresses itself in immortal verse is a very different thing from the hard labor out of which a great painting or a great piece of sculpture is developed. In the studio far more than in the study a friendly gesture, a kindling word, is craved beyond the mere material aids of daily life. If Americans want to help the Belgian artist, let them do so by taking an interest in his work, by seeking it out and doing it honor.

We have welcomed the schools of other nations here. There was, for example, only a few years ago, a considerable exhibition of modern German art at the Metropolitan Museum. Why not have an exhibition of modern Belgian art at the same place? The cooperation of the Belgian authorities could no doubt be secured without any difficulty, and, indeed, it would be desirable to obtain for the affair all the official sanction possible. We can imagine the generous zeal with which Mr. Whitlock would advance the interests of a scheme of this sort, facilitating the collection and transportation of exhibits, and seeking in every way to assist the Belgian painters and sculptors to a rich opportunity. After a period in New York the works shown might be transferred to Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and so on, as has been done in other cases. At the different formal openings the Belgian diplomatic representatives would presumably take part, making addresses full of facts about their country. In a short time the American public would have established profitable relations with a subject which is at present practically unknown here. It is not on altruistic grounds alone that some such enterprise as that which we have outlined should be promoted. The Belgian school deserves consideration on its merits. In discussing that fact, we would draw attention to the illustrations which appear on this page and in the Graphic Section.

## National Life and National Art.

This school has come late to a realization of its natural resources. The present writer can well remember the poor impression left by the Belgian section at the Chicago Fair. There were one or two good landscapes by Frans Courtois and he was moderately supported by a few effective workers in his field, but otherwise the only allent type in a rather colorless en-

to bring back the glory of the great centuries in Flemish painting. But he cannot galvanize into life their essentially uninspired productions. Navez, the pupil of David, could paint a good "Portrait" in David's manner. Baron Wappers and others could be romantic in a theatrical way, in what Dr. Roosevelt aptly describes as the golden age for vast patriotic compositions. Louis Gallait was fairly impressive as an historical painter and the perverted Wiertz, at rare intervals, gave tolerably persuasive form to his strange imaginings. But scarce any one of that generation had a glimmering of the old Flemish art of painting. These painters were sincere, laborious, but without technical magic and therefore dull.

The little interiors of Madou, delightful echoes of Teniers and the like, are the sole intimations we have of the recrudescence of an early ideal in a school struggling to be born anew. His success was due to the consistent nature of his realism. The Flemings have always been realists, even the primitives, with their high mystical fervors. The trouble with artists like Navez, Wappers and their colleagues was that their works were smothered in convention. The strength of the present school lies in its closer relation to the living, breathing world. Belgian art promises to flourish more and more because it has been drawing its sustenance from Belgian life. Incidentally it has re-awakened to an appreciation of technique.

Alfred Stevens was the standard bearer in the latter indispensable movement. The official pioneer is Baron Leys, who was born a few years earlier and rose to great fame in Belgium through his polished illustrations of national history. His talents are not to be underestimated. He was a sound draughtsman in the vein of Moreau, a good if not a brilliant colorist. In style as in subject he allied himself with the past too much in the spirit of the artist who leans upon more formulae. Accomplished as he was, good

teacher as he proved himself to be, he nevertheless arrested Belgian art rather than gave it impetus. Alfred Stevens was more serviceable for the simple reason that he was more of an artist in the strict sense, not an archaeologist at all, like Leys, but a creator of contemporary life and a man with a passion for technique in the most modern sense of the term. It is the fashion among some commentators to deplore his transition to Paris, where he devoted himself to the *frou frou* of the Second Empire. The skirts and ruffles of his fashionable models had nothing whatever to do with the genius of his art, but it is a fact, sharply enough, by the vitality of his pictures. The latter do not "date," though the figures in them do. They are beautiful—because they are beautifully painted. He, too, recalls the past, but in the right way. If you think of Vermeer of Delft in the presence of one of his masterpieces it is not to question his originality, but to admire the personal force with which he has emulated that painter's method. Paris never transmogrified Stevens as it did Van Beers. The latter was completely subordinated to the stuff in which he worked, the flashy stuff of the Salon at its worst, and was only saved from disaster by an instinctive adroitness and some persistence of such Flemish vigor as he put into his admirable portrait of Rochefort. To Van Beers, on the other hand, the Parisian milieu was almost exotic. It made a certain popularity, but leaves him a negligible type. Stevens cared about *chic* only in passing, as an element in nature for their instruction in simple, straightforward fashion. It is through their veracious realism that they are re-invigorating Belgian art, making it truly an expression of national life. Ideas developed away from the familiar currents of that life have swayed more than one of the men conspicuous in the newer school. The mysticism of Fernand Khnopff, the almost exotic of Van Beers, the qualities in the artist, the late Flemish Rops, give his etchings and drawings an atmosphere far removed from the color and a man like Cassiers may seem to be enamored of picturesque for its own sake when he portrays the peasant in his or her striking costume. The portraits of Theo van Rysselberghe may be touched by a vivacious distinctly cosmopolitan. But they remain faithful to the central principle of a school which has founded itself on the fact of a visible world, which is steeping itself once more in the honest realism of the ancient founders.

It is so with the painters and it is so with the sculptors. The light decorative grace of Jeff Lambaens, the suave modelling of Victor Rousseau, the rude breadth of Meunier, the more academic traits of J. Dillens, Paul Devigne and Jules Lagae, the vigor of Jacques de Jelaing, the Salon-like cleverness which belongs to Charles Samuel or to Charles van der Stappen, all are in the honest realism of the ancient founders.

A large number of prints, etchings and lithographs by J. Andre Smith are the present showing at Hobb's. The lithographs are views in and around New York. After having been printed they have been painted in water color, with usually a happy effect. Mr. Smith realizes the pictorial possibilities of this city and seems instinctively to seize upon effective viewpoints. The subjects cover a wide range, from the skyscrapers of lower Manhattan to the shanties of the wilds in the Bronx, and some of the interpretations are remarkably fine. In one or two of the prints the color is of more importance than the lithography. Many of the etchings are of great technical quality. The composition is generally good, and in some the etcher shows a certain indebtedness to Whistler. The plates done in pure etching are the best, though once in a while there is a judicious use of drypoint, as in the gondolas in "San Geremia, Venice." The subjects of the etchings are taken from many countries, though for the most part Venice and Brittany. Mezzotints in all stages of the process, from the preliminary sketch to the final proofs and cancelled plate, make the current show at the Ralston gallery. They are the work of Elizabeth Gulland and are to be donated to the New York Public Library. The plates are dainty, sympathetic and feminine.

The amateur of prints, who is car-



THE RED ROOF.  
(From the painting by Thaulow in the Freedman collection.)

## Random Impressions of Art in Current Exhibitions

The Freedman Pictures and Some Other Collections—Drawings and Prints—Paintings by American Pioneers—Degas and Manet.

The loan exhibition of paintings by Ralph Blakelock continues for another week at the Reinhardt gallery. It has won generous support, which should not slacken. When it is closed, by the way, Mr. Raymond Holland's landscapes will be put back upon the walls. The "modernists" are assuredly having their chance just now. They are at the Montross and Bourgeois galleries, and the Photo-Secession gallery offers the productions of Mr. Marsden Hartley. This information will doubtless interest the people who are interested in that sort of thing.

The collection of the late Andrew Freedman was yesterday placed on view at the American Art Galleries. It will be sold at the Plaza next Friday evening. This collection consists of about fifty modern paintings, foreign and American. The Barbizon group is represented, and there are examples of later types. There are no fewer than five pictures by Henner. Blakelock, with three examples, is the most conspicuous of the Americans. Works by Thaulow, Alma-Tadema, Pasini and Weiss are included. At the same place Mr. R. Ederheimer is showing more than three hundred fine etchings and engravings, examples of Rembrandt, Dürer, Claude and many other old masters. The early Italians open the catalogue, which closes with the eighteenth century Frenchmen and a few miscellaneous pieces. The sale will take place next Wednesday and Thursday evenings. Finally, the American Art Galleries present Mr. Edward Wassermann's Chinese porcelains and other Orientalia, to be sold Friday and Saturday afternoons, and a quantity of old velvets and embroideries, to be sold on Thursday afternoon, belonging to the Messrs. Beniguit.

### In Black and White and in Colors.

One of the most interesting "one-man shows" of the current season is that of drawings in color and pen-and-ink by the young Swedish-American, Carl Sprinchorn, at the Hclman gallery. Though all of these rapid little sketches are of value, those in pen and ink, with or without added color, are especially noteworthy. They are more than clever. They possess a truly remarkable quality of line, both beautiful and interpretative. With a few hurried strokes the artist secures a wonderful rendering of character and action. Look at No. 26, "The Exhausted Swimmer." How well one feels the weak, exhausted condition of the man as he reclines drooping on the shore. In No. 21, "From a French Novel," intensity of emotion is eloquently expressed, and most subtly, in the outline of the head and hands of the man and in the line of the woman's neck. "Sarah Bernhardt in 'Camille'" has undeniable charm in its pattern and delicate coloring. In "Greek Motif" Mr. Sprinchorn has obtained through the use of the fewest possible lines an effect almost sculptural, which carries the mind instinctively to the statues of Meunier. No. 26 has also very suggestive line. Many of the drawings are, however, but there is one, "St. Sebastian," which might have been done by some seventeenth century master. It has that quality and shows an unusual grasp of anatomical truth.

A large number of prints, etchings and lithographs by J. Andre Smith are the present showing at Hobb's. The lithographs are views in and around New York. After having been printed they have been painted in water color, with usually a happy effect. Mr. Smith realizes the pictorial possibilities of this city and seems instinctively to seize upon effective viewpoints. The subjects cover a wide range, from the skyscrapers of lower Manhattan to the shanties of the wilds in the Bronx, and some of the interpretations are remarkably fine. In one or two of the prints the color is of more importance than the lithography. Many of the etchings are of great technical quality. The composition is generally good, and in some the etcher shows a certain indebtedness to Whistler. The plates done in pure etching are the best, though once in a while there is a judicious use of drypoint, as in the gondolas in "San Geremia, Venice." The subjects of the etchings are taken from many countries, though for the most part Venice and Brittany. Mezzotints in all stages of the process, from the preliminary sketch to the final proofs and cancelled plate, make the current show at the Ralston gallery. They are the work of Elizabeth Gulland and are to be donated to the New York Public Library. The plates are dainty, sympathetic and feminine.

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which would have improved the etching mentioned above. Some of the plates are printed in colors, and they are pleasant enough, but Mr. Smith has not yet got along without this adventitious aid. Two sculptors also exhibit at the Goupil gallery, Miss Scudder showing several of her delightful fountain figures and other nudes as well as a group of terra cotta busts remarkable for their suave elegance, and Miss Jane Poupelet presenting nudes, busts and studies of animals. Miss Poupelet has an interesting style—simple, broad and enriched by a certain subtle personal quality. In the furthestmost room there are some glowing pictures of the San Francisco Fair by A. W. Emerson, more glowing than convincing.

The Macbeth gallery is showing a large number of canvases by American painters, old and new. It is particularly interesting as showing the development of landscape along the lines laid down by Wyant and Inness, for the present-day men represented are their followers to a greater or less degree. There are no less than seven canvases by Wyant, some of them his finest. "Opening in the Woods" and "Passing Shadows" have marked affinities with the well known "Broad Silent Valley" at the Metropolitan Museum. In "Avalanche Lake, Adirondacks," the gloom of the approaching storm amounts almost to terror. The "Landscape," No. 5, is a thing of surpassing beauty. Two of the four Innesses are exceptional. "Tenafly in Autumn," recalls the "Autumn Oaks" at the Museum, though it is not quite so fine. It might almost have been painted from the same scene, as a preliminary to the other. "Summer Foliage" is a superb interpretation of the greens of that season. These two artists, Wyant and Inness, by some means of their own, succeeded in laying bare the soul of our landscape as no others have done.

The visitor to the Blakelock exhibition may further study the work of that artist in the four examples at this show of Macbeth's. "Sunset" has a very luminous sky, with a line of trees in lacy silhouette against it. The landscape, No. 14, is of entrancing beauty, with a wonderful blue sky. "The Glow" is rich and moody, with an unusual feeling for space. Of the portraits the most interesting are the pair by Correy. They are of Mr. and Mrs. Adam Babcock, and are apparently of early date. They are a bit more stiff even than his usual work, but they contain his charm, and are uncompromisingly, even distressingly, truthful. There are two Stuart portraits, neither of great interest; a couple of fine studies by Huntington; and one by Jarvis, of Colonel John Williams, which has more charm than is often to be found in his work. With these older artists a host of modern men are represented by worthy and often beautiful pictures.

A number of small works, none of any particular importance, by Degas and Manet may be seen at the Durand-Ruel gallery. Of most interest among the examples of Degas are the indolent landscape sketches. These have a unique poetic quality. There are practically none of the pictures of ballerinas which have won for him most fame. There are two rather fine reserved portraits in browns and an interesting little racetrack picture, though in it something seems not to be quite right in the articulation of the principal horse. Of the Manets, three are worthy of notice. "Devant la psyché," a woman arranging her clothing, is very beautiful in color, well

composed, and loose in handling. "La brioche" is a well painted and absolutely symmetrical still life, with a white rose stuck into a loaf of bread. The sketch, "Place de Boulogne," is the best of all. It is a true Manet, though small and hurried.

Portraits of women and children by American painters are on view at the City Club. The four by Wilhelm Funk have the showiness common to his portraits of women, which are never so satisfactory as his pictures of men. By Robert Henri is a portrait of a strange looking girl in dark dull red with a green fan, which has more beauty than much of his recent work. Louis Mora's picture of two little girls has decided quaintness and charm besides being well painted.

Emile Fuchs's portraits at Seligman's are uneven in quality. They are on the whole good, though the men are apt to be far better than the women. He has generally managed to avoid the mere pretentious which seems to be the chief characteristic of so many fashionable painters. To be sure, he does once in awhile indulge himself in a slice of sentiment, but this is only in the less important pictures. The effect of some of the canvases is spoiled through carelessness of details, as in the high lights of the eyes and the drawing of a hand. "Mrs. Edwin Gould" is a well arranged picture. "Dr. Howard W. Beal" is an exceptionally fine strong portrait. It is a pity that the drawing of the left hand

should not have been more carefully considered. The portrait of Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson is admirable. Mr. Fuchs got decided character in these portraits of men. The little portrait of Mrs. Shady is by far the best of those of women, but the brushwork should be smoother in so very small a painting, which must, of necessity, be observed close at hand.

The Braun gallery is exhibiting a number of paintings, portraits and genre, the work of a French artist, Mme. Lucas-Iobiquet. The portraits are vivacious, of the type generally produced by painters of polite society. The notable collection of Japanese colored prints formed by Mr. and Mrs. John Osgood Blanchard during a three-year residence in Japan attracted a representative gathering of lovers of high class art. It is said that no collection of Japanese prints of greater importance or of such uniformly fine quality has ever been offered at public sale in this country.

What is regarded by experts as a splendid example of the skillful engraving and printing of Yelsh, a pupil of Kano Eisen (1750-1815), entitled "Extravagant and Luxurious Genji," brought the highest price of the afternoon—\$470. It was bought by Otto Bernet, as agent. It depicts a prince standing near a door, held open by a woman in a figured black kimono. Another is advancing with a spray of wisteria, on which is a bird, and a princess is coming from her bullock cart, under an umbrella, carried by one of her ladies in waiting, with two others following. The picture, which is a triptych, is signed "Kisha ga," that being part of the artist's name.

The second lot, price \$390—was paid by Frederick W. Cookin—who wrote the foreword in the catalogue, for "A Museum, Moon," called one of the gems of the collection, by Harunobu, who invented polychrome printing in 1765. Mr. Cookin says of this artist, who painted a charming version of the Chinese legend of Nohu: "From 1763 until his untimely death he held the centre of the stage against all rivals."

W. W. Seaman, as agent, gave \$370 for "The Clothes Beating Tama River." This artistic triptych is considered one of Toyokuni's most famous works. For "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove," representing the "Moths of Japan," by the same artist, Elizabeth Randol gave \$330. For another gem of the collection by Hokusai, "Senpai Kai Sei," showing the slopes of Fuji, the lower part covered with trees, the upper part showing a snow-covered mountain gorge through which flow the waters of the Fuji River, brought \$150, the highest price at the evening session. Each lot is painted in a black and white. They are beautiful in color and true. We understand that they are intended to be psychological portraits, if such a thing be possible, of these charming objects.

For the country-wide electrical celebration which is to be held in the United States next December the Society for Electrical Development wishes to obtain a good poster, and to that end announces a competition which is now

open and will not close until June 1. A grand prize of \$1,000 will be awarded, and there will be others, making a total of \$2,200. Particulars may be obtained from the poster committee, at 29 West Thirty-ninth Street.

JAPANESE PRINT BRINGS \$470

The first session of the sale at the American Art Galleries yesterday of



THE SILENCE OF THE TOMB.  
(From the sculpture by the Belgian, J. Dillens.)



FATHER AND MOTHER.  
(From the sculpture by the Belgian, Jules Lagae.)

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They are pretty pictures, showing no deep insight into character. These women are more successful than those of men. There is a distinctly feminine sentiment about her work generally. Her outdoor pictures have not that fidelity to nature that American artists strive after, but they are nicely painted. "Approaching Storm" is effective because of the broad masses of color in the sails of the fishing boats.

At the New York School of Applied Design for Women are some "Autumn Leaves" by Van Deering Perrine. We believe that they were, earlier in the year, exhibited at the Thumb Box Gallery. Each leaf is painted on a black ground. They are beautiful in color and true. We understand that they are intended to be psychological portraits, if such a thing be possible, of these charming objects.

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CHARACTERISTIC EXAMPLES  
of the  
LEADING AMERICAN ARTISTS



THE PRINCESS MARIE JOSE OF BELGIUM.  
(From the sculpture by the Belgian, Victor Rousseau.)

smile was Jan Van Beers, and his cleverness was so Parisian in character that it detached him from the rest as though he were really an alien. But that was more than twenty years ago. In the interim Belgium has been developing something like a national school. M. Joseph Prutik of Brussels, who was lecturing on the subject at the Museum of French Art in this city a little while ago, was so vividly conscious of this circumstance that he could hardly understand why he had found it difficult to discover only the slenderest traces of modern Belgian art at the Metropolitan. It is not, to tell the truth, a matter of surprise that Alfred Stevens—another figure with Parisian traits—should be about the only member of the school to make his way here. It is, we repeat, a new school, which has but slowly evolved itself out of the backward conditions of the nineteenth century, and in the nature of things it must take time to assert itself.

Like many another Continental people the Belgians broke with their artistic past in the eighteenth century. In that period they forgot the golden tradition of their incomparable primitives, the tradition of the Van Eycks, Van der Weyden, Memling, Gerard David and the rest, and they abandoned with equal completeness the principles of Rubens and Van Dyck. The strain of national artistic energy grew lower and lower. When Belgium became the cockpit of Europe it disappeared altogether. Max Rooses, whose "Art in Flanders," in the invaluable "Art and Artists" series published by the Berliners, gives all the details of the story, does the best he can for the men who tried, after the Napoleonic wars, to



THE TOILERS.  
(From the sculpture by the Belgian, Constantin Meunier.)



THE LITTLE FISHERS.  
(From the painting by Harpignies in the Freedman collection.)